

VZCZCXYZ0022  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHLP #3189/01 3401308  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 061308Z DEC 07  
FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5879  
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 7375  
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 4742  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 8650  
RUEHBU/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 5877  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 3094  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 3296  
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 5079  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO 5731  
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 0339  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUMIAAA/USCINCSO MIAMI FL  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0761  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
RHMFISS/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003189

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/06/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)  
SUBJECT: MEDIA LUNA MASISTAS: CAUGHT IN THE MIDDLE

REF: A. LA PAZ 3138  
[1](#)B. LA PAZ 3118

Classified By: A/DCM Mike Hammer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Moderate ruling-party MAS members complain that they are labeled as traitors by President Evo Morales. They also lament an increasingly hostile environment in the Congress as Morales has decided to take a tougher line with the legislative branch. Nevertheless, MAS Senator Guido Guardia is confident his moderate views will eventually be vindicated by the "silent majority" of Bolivians who are tired of extremist politics. He believes Evo has no choice but to move to the political center, as his choice is not between competing versions of a new constitution, but between a new constitution and a civil war he cannot win. According to Guardia, the Venezuelan referendum December 2 and Chavez's reaction to the vote provide an example for Bolivia and Evo Morales, respectively. However, early indications are that Evo is undeterred by the Chavez defeat and remains ever more determined to deliver a Christmas present for his radical MAS supporters -- a new constitution. End Summary.

Lonely MAS "Rebels" on the Outs  
-----

[1](#)2. (C) MAS Senator Guido Guardia told PolOff December 4 he is the "only rebel" MAS Congressman speaking out against extra-legal actions of the government. Since publishing an open letter to the President Evo Morales, Guardia has been branded a traitor by ruling MAS-party leadership and politely shunned by his MAS colleagues since. In the letter, Guardia criticized the government's handling of the Constituent Assembly issue and resulting violent protests. Guardia recounted a call from a journalist notifying him that his letter was stapled to list of photos of congressmen that MAS loyalists were not/not going to allow into Congress. Guardia was indeed barred from the November 27 session, along with most members of the opposition. His photo on the list was superimposed with the words "sold out."

[1](#)3. (C) Guardia said that although many MAS members share his disapproval of the government's recent "illegal" tactics, they do not feel strongly enough to voice their concerns

given that they agree with the desired end result. MAS Deputy Ana Lucia Reis said she boycotts votes she disagrees with, such as the controversial November 27 session vote to change Constituent Assembly rules. She claimed "very few" MAS representatives in the lower house (Chamber of Deputies) used this as a form of dissent, which she acknowledged was a weak form of protest.

#### Evo's New Insult and Order Congressional Approach

-----

¶4. (C) Both Guardia and Reis praised the Congress for its (at least off-camera) bipartisanship and as a promoter of compromise. Reis claimed this changed decidedly with Morales' adoption of a more hands-on approach to the Congress, which Evo laid out to MAS congressional representatives in mid-November. Reis said Morales spent most of the meeting insulting members, calling them "all worthless" and asserting: "I am governing by myself; none of you are helping me." Morales' message, according to Reis: "if you can't do anything, I will tell you what to do and you will do it." Morales then declared the constitution would be passed by December 14. He singled out MAS Senator Peredo to "go in the kitchen with the women if you can't do anything in the Congress."

¶5. (C) Some representatives found this heavy-handedness, which has been building for some time, to be disrespectful of their role. But most of the new deputies swept into power on Evo's coattails are content to fall in line, disposed to Evo-worship with no experience or internal sense of direction. It does not help, Reis adds, that many new deputies need Evo's benevolence, as they cannot survive on their meager salaries.

#### Suspicious Minds and No Open Arms for Moderates

-----

¶6. (C) Guardia said he feels very vulnerable being the only MAS Senator in the three opposition-dominated "Amazonian" states of Santa Cruz, Beni, and Pando. Although his moderate views have gained him some acceptance from opposition circles, he fears attacks on self and property from radical opposition youth, who are not fully under "anyone's control" and may be unaware of his break with the government. Just a year ago, youth groups were hanging effigies of Guardia in Santa Cruz's main square "just for being MAS." He complained to PolOff that he could not depend on MAS protection and told the media that the MAS has imposed a "death sentence" on him. He told PolOff he was surprised at the hostility of the MAS response to his letter, since "it only asks the President to negotiate for the good of the people and to stop meddling in other branches of government."

¶7. (C) Pando Prefect Leopoldo Fernandez allegedly has scolded Reis, telling her to get off the fence and "pick a side." The opposition-aligned Prefect said she had no excuse for supporting the government as a businesswoman and "not indigenous," which Reis found offensive. She has also lost standing with Morales and, to a lesser extent, with the MAS President of the Chamber of Deputies, once a close ally.

#### Fear of Radicals

-----

¶8. (C) Although she sympathizers with resentment over the blocking of opposition congressmen from the November 27 session, Reis was appalled that a rogue pro-opposition mob burned down the home of alternate Senator Abraham Cuellar for attending and voting to redistribute funds from department (state) coffers. She claimed Prefect Fernandez was furious with the organizers, who have made his life "infinitely harder." Although there have been no threats against Reis yet, and she continues to be personally popular in Pando, she is nevertheless taking out insurance on her hotel this week. Reis is concerned leaders on both sides will not be able to control their radical supporters.

¶9. (C) The opposition was also blamed for torching the home of Chuquisaca Prefect (Governor) David Sanchez, another MAS moderate, following violent November 23-24 protests. Reis, however, claimed sources in the MAS point to a government organization as responsible for the arson. The MAS was upset with Sanchez for his perceived weak support of the government, calls to compromise with the opposition, and gall to interrupt the Constituent Assembly in Sucre on November 24, asking them to adjourn in light of outbreak in violence.

#### MAS Fear in Santa Cruz; Defiance in Pando

-----

¶10. (C) Guardia explained that fellow moderate MAS supporters in his state of Santa Cruz feel boxed in between fear of opposition forces and prodding by more radical MAS leadership in La Paz to publicly support President Morales, a feeling echoed by MAS Santa Cruz City Councilman Osvaldo Peredo (Reftel A). In the end, Guardia said Santa Cruz MAS supporters were "afraid to say anything," let alone organize counter-demonstrations. PolOff reported December 5 that national police in Santa Cruz are staying away from an opposition gathering of about 1,000 and leaving security to city authorities. In the wake of violent clashes between police and protesters in Sucre November 23-24, Santa Cruz police are so afraid of triggering public anger they are hesitant to even write traffic tickets.

¶11. (C) The leaders of Santa Cruz's four indigenous ethnicities also burned a copy of the MAS-drafted constitution and joined 70 Cruzenos in a hunger strike today. One of the leaders, Jose Urananzi with the Autonomous Indigenous Council, chided President Morales as an "indigenous farmer" and claimed the group could not support a constitution "without consensus and with the death of Bolivians." Indigenous leaders in Beni similarly rejected the constitution and joined an opposition hunger strike. Hunger strikes and demonstrations continue throughout six of Bolivia's nine departments.

¶12. (C) Reis discounted violence in Pando November 30 as an aberration in the normally peaceful department of Pando. She said the incident was fueled by the involvement of national police, shipped in from La Paz ostensible to keep order for a march of thousands of MAS supporters. This perceived affront to Pando's sense of autonomy resulted in six badly beaten police officers and the kidnapping of five others. Eventually the police agreed to quarter themselves outside of the capital of Cobija pending transportation back to La Paz and the hostages were released. A child was hospitalized from inhaling riot gas, but not killed, as some media reported. Reis said the MAS will continue to be vocal and organize counter-demonstrations in Pando, but as long as the national government does not provoke similar confrontations, there should be no violence. She warned however, that the government could "choose" to interpret largely-symbolic opposition road closures at the Pando's borders starting December 3 to be an act of "sedition," even though the blockades could easily be avoided by using side roads.

#### Will Silent Majority Push MAS to Moderation?

-----

¶13. (C) Despite the pressure and potential risk, Guardia has no plans to change party affiliation or his "aggressively moderate" positions. "I will not change. Morales and the opposition radicals will have to change." He claimed his positions are not just altruistic sacrifice, but will prove to enhance his political standing in the long run. He said Morales will soon have to reach out to moderate leaders to build bridges, realizing that the vast majority of Bolivians are moderates who are "more concerned with their livelihoods than ideology." He claimed this silent majority of moderates would force leaders to emerge or reposition themselves in the center, where Morales used to be and where there is "giant gap" now. He took a seemingly biblical tone with the media, declaring in an interview that: "I forgive the president and his advisors; they don't know what they're doing." He told

PolOff he was confident time would prove him right and that "there is still a lot of time" to work out compromises before a referendum on the MAS-drafted constitution, "if it even needs to get to that stage."

¶14. (C) Reis was not as optimistic that the MAS would de-radicalize, but cannot reconcile aligning herself with the opposition. Once an influential player within the Chamber of Deputies, she feels trapped between the extremes, used by the MAS, and appears resigned to distancing herself from controversy.

Venezuelan Referendum will "Show Morales the Way"

-----

¶15. (C) Guardia said Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez has "provided a path for (President) Morales" to back away from a zero-sum game on the Constitution and negotiate with the opposition. He said the December 2 vote against granting Chavez additional powers showed Evo a referendum victory for the MAS-drafted constitution is not guaranteed and to accept such setbacks to his change agenda in a "dignified and peaceful way." Guardia asserted Morales' recent overtures to the opposition are more than political window dressing, but represent a realization that his "my way or the highway" approach to ramming his will on Congress and the Constituent Assembly is a flawed strategy which will ultimately lead to a civil war he cannot win and international isolation. "The choice is not between this or that constitution, it is between a constitution and civil war."

¶16. (C) Guardia said the government might even postpone a new constitution for a time in order to allow both sides a "pause," if it could achieve some key goals through amendments to the existing constitution. Guardia predicts Morales will sideline advisors who tell him "he can have everything without a cost," re-engage with the opposition, and save face by appearing to sacrifice his own political agenda "for the people." Guardia has said publicly that "if Evo doesn't change his attitude he'll end up like (ex-President Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada) Goni, sidelined on the bench waiting for judgment."

Comment

-----

¶17. (C) Times are indeed tough for Media Luna MASistas, at least the very few that are gutsy enough to push back against the government. But, these moderates reveal some MAS discontent with Evo. Morales' base in El Alto also appears a bit restless: El Alto social leaders have demanded that Morales appoint three ministers from there, a November poll showed support for Evo in El Alto down from the usual over 90 percent to 80 percent, and, as inflation rises into double digits, those most likely to feel the pain will be the poor Alenos. In the near term, there is no serious threat to Evo from within as most MASistas recognize that without him there is no one to hold the party together. Evo, however, needs to produce a victory for his supporters and at the moment he is zeroed-in on delivering a new constitution.

URS